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Remarks of General Walter B. Smith

and his answers to questions concerning

CAREER SERVICE IN CIA

at the 8th Agency Orientation Course, 21 November 1952

General Smith: I have found that there are always a number of questions which our people would like to ask, not only in connection with the over-all business of the Agency, but in connection with their personal careers. Please have no hesitation in asking anything which may occur to you. If I cannot myself answer your questions from the platform, I will see that you get them answered by someone who is possibly more competent and more familiar with the details than I. I want to remind you that the service of national intelligence and of national security has become a permanent, honorable career. It is in effect a fourth service as compared with the three military services, and its operation will be continuous and accelerated in time of war, under its own command and under its own organization. Since the passage of the National Security Act, intelligence is able to offer you permanent, secure and honorable careers and it is to your credit and to our advantage that you have accepted that career earnestly and seriously. I do not think that many of you will ever feel that you have made a mistake.

Question: Regarding the stability of the Agency, will the change in the Administration have any effect on the Agency, and what would happen to us in time of hot war?

General Smith: Since this is a statutory Agency supported by a career service, there will be no change with changes in the Administration. The Director and his principal Deputies and Assistants are non-political appointees and, while the Director himself must undoubtedly be a man whom the Chief Executive is willing to accept, and to whom he will give a certain measure of confidence, it is unlikely that you will ever have a Director whose status will change with changes in the Administration. As a statutory organization established to service the National Government, there is no possibility of change that I can anticipate over the long view; nor is there any in wartime, except that, in theatres of active operations - that is where shooting is going on - our personnel under the senior representative present

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would automatically report to and carry out the orders of the senior military commander in the theatre of operations, just as they are now doing in Korea. There the military requirement of winning the campaign or winning the war is paramount and everything else is subordinate to that. However, our personnel in an active theatre of operations would have other responsibilities. They would have missions targeted outside but based on a military theatre of operations. Those missions would be transmitted to them from headquarters with the concurrence and knowledge of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and they would be supported by the Theatre Commander concerned.

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Question: Are the Senior Representatives overseas your alter egos?

General Smith: Yes. With relation to myself or to any future Director, they occupy the same position that the commander of a theatre of operations, in a military sense, would occupy with respect to the military heads in Washington.

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Question: What do you think about the policy of rotation of individuals in key spots, in keeping with the career concept?

General Smith: Well, since I've ordered it and pressed it, I'm obviously in favor of it. I would like to amplify that a little bit. In the first place, one cannot conduct global operations, as we conduct them, exclusively and entirely controlled by a desk in Washington. In the second place, our people in the field believe, and unfortunately in some cases they've had grounds to feel, that the men who are telling them what to do have never been on the sharp end of the stick. There is a third and very impelling reason. An Agency of this kind, like a military agency, is extremely ill-advised if it keeps its best talent at home. It should get the best people that it can - get the most experienced people that it has - the most reliable people that it has - out to the point of impact. Thus, when you issue an order to a man in the field, knowing him, knowing his capability and his reliability, you have every assurance that it will be properly carried out and that the duty will be well performed. Accordingly, it is desirable to get the people we have here occupying key positions, who have demonstrated their fitness for trust and competence, as rapidly as possible to the critical places outside of the United States which are the key to our effective operations.

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Question: Do you feel that there is enough working level cooperation between CIA Offices today, within the limits, of course, of security?

General Smith: Yes, I think so. You have to try to arrive at a happy medium between the necessity of knowing and the actual need of knowing, particularly with regard to our sensitive Offices. At least, the intention of the policy and the desire to provide that cooperation exists, although the machinery, from time to time, has not been as effective as one would like. I hope to increase this by gradual transfer of qualified personnel from one Division of the Agency to another, to a greater extent than has heretofore obtained, so that each officer - each employee - will have a broader perspective than that given him by work within one particular Division in which he may well specialize. But he should have one or two alternate specialties, particularly when he goes out into the field.

*Rotation (from for)
between Divisions
very important
operation*

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Question: Many CIA people have reserve status. Does the fact that a CIA employee is a member of an Army reserve hinder his career or help it in CIA?

General Smith: Why to a certain extent I should think it would help it, because there are many jobs that we do in which military training or past military experience is an essential quality. Besides, there are many jobs that we have to do where it might be desirable to have a person actually identified with the military service, in which case we can have them ordered to active duty, assigned to us and reimburse the military department concerned. So, in my opinion, reserve status is an asset because it increases the scope of the usefulness of a CIA officer.

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Question: Are you concerned about personnel turnover and are you taking steps to minimize it?

General Smith: Very much so. Our personnel turnover is by comparison relatively small, but it's still much too large. That's one of the reasons why I brought an Inspector General down here and made him available to anybody in the Agency who had any complaint of any kind. As you know, you all have opportunity also for a direct appeal to myself or Mr. Dulles if you feel that you have been a victim of injustice. So there is no excuse for anybody

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going unheard if they have a complaint or a legitimate question to raise with regard to their official or personal lives within the Agency. I will not, however, tolerate anybody going outside the Agency. I had a case about six months ago. Since it was a special one, I have decided to ignore it. One of our employees wrote a letter to the President - of course he handed it to me. But we have an Inspector General for that, and you can all come to someone.

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Question: Since we can not tolerate mediocrity in CIA, what does an employee do when he finds it on the job?

General Smith: If he is an executive, who is responsible for eliminating mediocrity, he should promptly eliminate it. On the other hand, no one likes to be a talebearer, and no one likes a talebearer. In dealing with your subordinates, be completely cold-blooded in eliminating mediocrity. Where you encounter it among your colleagues on the same level, just grit your teeth and hope that your immediate superior will be as quick to recognize it as you are.

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Question: With regard to the official ceiling on T/O's, do you anticipate that there will be further cuts in the organization?

General Smith: No, I don't. We'll have to increase a little bit for training purposes. It's a simple fact that while we have a rather large personnel ceiling budgeted for, we can't get the qualified people to fill that personnel ceiling. They just simply don't exist. We've gone about the limit. Occasionally one may get from the outside very highly qualified men or women, tempt them in, twist their arms and get them to sign up on a career basis. But those are becoming fewer and fewer so we must depend on the younger people that we are bringing up through the ranks. Of course that is, in any technical service like our own, the heart and soul of a career organization. Unless every private carries the baton of a field marshall in his knapsack, he hasn't very much to look forward to. Unless every junior officer has the right to expect promotion through the grades and ultimately the opportunity to occupy the highest post in the career of his choice, there is very little to hold him in his job. So, my intention is to keep our numbers down, to be selective instead of expansive, and to look more and more to the juniors to fill the senior posts.

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younger people brought up from ranks